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ABSTRACT

In 1996, Hagerstown Junior College (Maryland) participated in the American Association of Community Colleges' Exploring America's Communities project, which works to strengthen the teaching and learning of American history, literature, and culture at U.S. community colleges. The primary goals of the action plan were to create a series of faculty development activities to provide the background and foundation for infusing the curriculum with common threads that bind diverse communities within the American experience. Two colloquia, one discussing the Mennonite, Pennsylvania Dutch, and African American communities, and one discussing the Indian, Iranian, and Greek communities, were held. Three "lunch and learn" activities exploring different facets of culture were conducted. The first panel featured a Native American student, a Ukrainian student, and an immigrant from the Dominican Republic. The second featured an Episcopal priest, a Jewish rabbi, and a Hindu articulating the commonalties and divisions that religion can bring to cultures. The third was a musical presentation by an Irish American and an Iranian American which showed that music is not simply a form of entertainment, but reflects and molds society's values. The basic obstacle for the program was a lack of financial support due to diminishing resources and increased demands on staff. Ideas for infusing unity, diversity, justice, family values, social priorities, and discrimination into the curriculum will advance in January. (HAA)

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Hagerstown Junior College
Exploring America's Communities
Progress Report

In: National Conference on American Pluralism and Identity Program Book
(New Orleans, LA, January 18-19, 1997)

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HAGERSTOWN
JUNIOR
COLLEGE

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Introduction

Hagerstown Junior College is located two and one half miles from downtown Hagerstown, Maryland in Washington County. The campus is located on a semi-rural 187 acre site which is easily accessible from interstates 81 and 70. The college is located 70 miles to the west of Baltimore, Maryland and Washington, D.C and is included in the Baltimore-Washington Metropolitan Area. The college attracts students from nearby Pennsylvania, West Virginia, and Virginia. Each semester there are approximately 3,000 credit students. Approximately 1100 are full time and 1900 are part time. The average age is 28. In addition to the credit program the college serves 7000 non-credit students through its continuing education programs.

Primary goal of project

The primary goals of the action plan were to provide a series of faculty development activities to provide the background and foundation for infusing the curriculum with common threads that bind diverse communities within the American experience.

Accomplishments

In May the team organized a colloquium entitled "Who are We in the Western Maryland region"? The panel represented the Mennonite, Pennsylvania Dutch, and African American communities. This event was well attended by the faculty and served to highlight not only some of the major cultural attributes of these communities, but also reminded the audience of the many common threads running through the cultural experience of the local region. In August we continued with a second faculty colloquium which focused on HJC faculty who spoke about their heritages from India, Iran, and Greece. Each of the speakers responded to a provided series of questions which

focused on how their cultures compare and contrast to American society. Each speaker gave a brief demographic description of their native land and then proceeded to comment on family structure and values, ways of dress, educational expectations, economic conditions, national and religious holidays, and stereotypes by and about Americans. Each presenter brought a collection of cultural artifacts which added a visual dimension of cultural enrichment. Even though most faculty see each other frequently during the year there is seldom the opportunity for an exchange of in-depth formal discussion of personal and cultural experiences. The faculty was especially interested in the various educational systems and the place of women in other countries. The colloquium was an excellent format to illustrate the diversities in our midst while sharing our common experiences. Immigrants to this country have learned that while there are vast differences between their two cultures, there are great similarities.

During the fall semester we sponsored three "lunch and learn" activities from 11:30 to 1:00 during our Thursday meeting time. Each of the three programs explored different facets of culture. The first "lunch and learn" panel featured three students-- A Native American, a Ukranian, and an immigrant from the Dominican Republic. Each spoke about native customs, activities, and routines and commented on how their lives have changed through the American acculturation process. The Navajo student was especially articulate about her two societies and marveled at the insight she gained about one through her experiences with the other. After she lived in her "Other Society" (American society), she said that she was especially impressed with the sophistication of her native language and the wisdom of her elders.

The second "lunch and learn" activity featured speakers from three different religions. This panel did an exceptionally good job in articulating the commonalities and divisions that religion can bring to culture. An Episcopal priest, a Jewish rabbi, and a follower of a Hindu guru spoke about the basic tenets of their faiths, the uniqueness of their convictions, and their qualified statements about "the

many trails to the top of the same mountain". The success of this particular program was enhanced by the particular combination of personalities on the panel. Each of them had a deep respect for the others. The panel shared two basic assumptions: (1) that we look to tradition to find truths that are not scientifically provable, and (2) there are transcendent truths, i.e., good and bad do exist in the world. In different ways the presenters expressed the thought that religion is meant to be a positive force. Several of the attendees commented that the presentation had caused them to think differently about themselves and others in a way that is more inclusionary.

The third "lunch and learn" activity was a presentation of ethnic expressions in music by an Irish American and an Iranian American. The listeners found the Irish harp to be very relaxing and the commentary between selections to be quite informative. Music is not simply a form of entertainment; it reflects and molds society's values. The harp, for instance, was used as a political instrument. In their songs harpers criticized the British crown and as a result the Celtic harp was virtually destroyed. Only four survive from the early period. Early Celtic harp music has been lost, so harp music today has its roots in Europe, especially Italy. Many familiar musical selections today can be traced through a long history created by harpers several centuries ago. Harp music has strong ties to our Appalachian roots which are mainly Scotch-Irish. Harp music also has associations with New Age music.

The santur (Persian dulcimer) provided an interesting contrast to the harp. The music selected was classical Persian music. Eastern music often sounds out of tune to Westerners because Western music is based on 12 different pitches, each one one-half-step apart. Eastern music, the artist explained, is based on more than 12 different pitches, with combinations of quarter steps and three-quarter steps. The dulcimer varies in shape and size and is found in many different cultures. The Persian dulcimer differs from the American (mountain dulcimer), Greek dulcimer and others in its construction. While the Persian dulcimer has movable bridges, the others have stationary ones.

Obstacles

The basic problems surrounding the implementation of new courses and programs or major curricular changes in existing programs are related to financial resources. On a small campus such as HJC there are diminishing resources with increased demands on staff who have limited time to develop new courses.

Remaining task

At this writing five of the six programs have taken place. The sixth is scheduled for January 9,1997. Ideas for curriculum infusion will be advanced at that time. Through the facility of variable credit seminar faculty quickly can arrange 1-3 credit courses in subject areas not presently addressed in the curriculum. For example unity and diversity could be addressed under such topics "women in society", "ethnicity in the region", or "non Christian religious values". A second approach might be to design a new interdisciplinary course focusing on major issues such as justice, family values, or social priorities. The third proposal would explore the process of infusing cultural awareness projects into service learning options which are being developed at the college. Included in the project would be reports on their experiences and understanding of justice, discrimination, and "civil society", etc.

Responses of colleagues and students

Conversations in classrooms, faculty offices, and hallways cannot be summarized in a unilateral convergence. Our programs which focused on family values, religious commonalities, and cultural traditions have shown us that there are many answers to life's challenges, predicaments, and questions as they are played out in different parts of the world and in different segments of American society. We are brought together by the tenacious belief that in America, despite our history of examples of extraordinary injustice, discrimination, and individualism that eventually there will be equal opportunity. In our class discussions we realize that the universals of culture derive from the fact that all societies must perform the same essential functions if they are to survive. In meeting these prerequisites for group life, people inevitably design similar, though not identical, patterns for

living. As Clyde Kluckhohn wrote, "All cultures constitute somewhat distinct answers to essentially the same questions posed by human biology and by the generalities of the human situation." It is our challenge to find ways for these distinct answers to be acceptable to all. Meanwhile we know that still there is division, and there is ethnocentrism. Our discussions also concluded that racial division in American society may be getting wider. One of our faculty wrote an article for the local newspaper "Is It Class or Race That Most Shapes Our Values". He concludes his article by saying:

> Ideally speaking, it is hoped that a liberal arts education in conjunction with any occupational skills will make it possible for each citizen to remove the binders of race and class origin and work for the long term well being of the whole community.

Our conversations are resting for now on the thought that basic repairs are required in our society. We are concerned that "the civil society" (discussed in From Me To We) is collapsing. The fulfillment of a democratic system is dependent on the government, private sector, and the "civil society". The challenge to reinvigorate our civil society is also the challenge to reinvigorate a family structure which will institute and reinforce humanitarian and egalitarian values which mature through a liberal arts education.